

The Good of Friendship

Christ the King Seminary Vancouver

Introduction

It is reasonable to ask, how friends relate to our particular vocation? Do some friendships help or harm our living out this call?

Greek Philosophy

We discover among the 5th to 4th century philosophers Socrates and Plato a kind of struggle to elevate erotic relationships between two men. An example from Plato's *Symposium* is instructive here. Socrates, the husband of Xanthippe, continuously rebuffs the various ruses of Alcibiades to seduce him sexually. Instead, Socrates focuses consistently on the higher things that are good and beautiful in order to follow his own vocation to be a philosopher, a lover of wisdom.¹ Alcibiades declared in Plato's *Symposium* that "Socrates is the only man in the world that can make me feel ashamed... [Y]ou've only got to open him up and you'll find him so full of temperance and sobriety that you can hardly believe your eyes. Because, you know, he doesn't really care a row of pins about good looks—on the contrary..."² Alcibiades concluded that Socrates had been elevated by "little images inside" him that were "so godlike, so golden, so

¹ See Plato, *Symposium* in *Collected Works*, eds., Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 215a-219e. See also, 201c-209a.

² *Ibid.*, 216 b-e.

beautiful, and so utterly amazing that there was nothing for it but to do exactly what he told me."³ Not only was Socrates himself elevated by love of god-like goodness, but he also effectively elevated his friend.

In the 4th c. BC, the philosopher Aristotle, husband of Pythias, initiates the first extensive theoretical discussion of friendship, when he dedicated two full books of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to the topic. He began his discussion with the famous observation: "[F]riendship is virtue or implies virtue, and is besides most necessary with a view to living. For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods..."⁴

Aristotle argued further that if we could identify what it is that we love about our friend, we could distinguish between fundamentally three different kinds of friendships: those based on ⁽¹⁾ what is useful for us, those based on what is ⁽²⁾ pleasant for us, and those which are based on what is good for the friend, or a virtuous friendship.⁵ There is nothing wrong *per se* with friendships based on pleasure or utility, according to Aristotle, but they are not permanent, nor are they

³ *Ibid.*, 216e-217a.

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: Random House, 1970), 1155a 3-5.

⁵ "There are therefore three kinds of friendship, equal in number to the things that are loveable; for with respect to each there is a mutual and recognized love, and those who love each other wish well to each other in that respect in which they love one another. Now those who love each other for their **utility** do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other. So too with those who love for the sake of **pleasure**; it is not for their character that men love ready witted people, but because they find them pleasant." *Ibid.*, 1156a7-14. My emphasis

established on a love of the good for the friend, nor on what is the true good for oneself, but rather on inferior goods, such as what is useful or pleasant for oneself.⁶

Aristotle argues that:

Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their [friend's] sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of their own nature and not incidentally; therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good—and goodness is an enduring thing.⁷

The goal of this kind of friendship is summarized: “as the virtuous man is to himself, he is to his friend also (for his friend is another self).”⁸ In “Aristotle on the Shared Life,” Nancy Sherman summarizes: “Happiness or good living is thus ascribable to me, not as an isolated individual, but as a self extended, so to speak, by friends.”⁹ These virtue-friendships turn out to be also useful and pleasant as well, although they are rare because they take time and familiarity.” Aristotle says it colloquially: “[M]en cannot know each other till they have ‘eaten salt together.’”¹⁰

⁶ See James Bernard Murphy, “Virtue and the Good of Friendship,” American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings, vol. 71 (1997): 189-201, especially 193.

⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b 6-12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1170 b 6-7.

⁹ Nancy Sherman, “Aristotle on the Shared Life,” in Neera Kapur Badhwar, ed, *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), chapt. 5: 91-107, here, 94. See also Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), “A Look at Aristotle’s Ethics” and “Aristotle on Friendship,” pp. 31-69.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156b 26-27.

Roman Philosophy

3 In the 1st c. B.C., Cicero, a Stoic philosopher, married to and divorced from both Terentia and Publilia, followed Aristotle's understanding of the great value of friendships based on virtue. In his essay "On Friendship" Cicero stated: "Now friendship may be thus defined: a complete accord on all subjects human and divine, joined with mutual good will and affection."¹¹ He ~~added to his~~ definition a regulation that established its foundation solidly on virtue alone: "Let this, then, be laid down as the first law of friendship, that we should ask from friends, and do for friends, only what is good."¹² Now Cicero thought that true friendship occurred primarily among men (male human beings): "In the face of a true friend a man sees as it were a second self."¹³

Christian Friendship

4 / A. Jesus Christ reveals the Friendship of God

The way that Jesus Christ revealed his own love of friendship transformed the philosophy of friendship, previously articulated by pagan philosophers. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist described himself as the intimate friend of Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom: "He who has the

¹¹ Cicero, *De Amiticia* "On Friendship," in *Letters of Marcus Tullius Cicero with Treatises on Friendship and Old Age* (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1937), #6.

¹² *Ibid.*, #13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, #7. There is a possibility that he thought that his daughter Tullia was like another self to him before she died. Generally, however, Cicero thought of friendships as occurring primarily among men who shared political and philosophical interests. Nancy Sherman points out that this view of a friend as another self is also present in Aristotle: "a virtue friend is 'another self (*allos autos*), 'another me' (*allos egō*) as Aristotle strikingly puts it in the *Magna Moralia* (1213a13, 1213a24, NE 1170b7, EE 1245a30).", in "Aristotle on the Shared Life," 102.

bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full." (Jn. 3:29) Here, the friend rejoices with the joy of his friend. The 20th C. philosopher and saint St Edith Stein, in her study *On The Problem of Empathy*, described how it is possible for friends to experience shared joy through empathy: "My friend comes to me beaming with joy and tells me he has passed his examination. I comprehend his joy empathically; transferring myself into it, I comprehend the joyfulness of the event and am now primordially joyful over it myself."¹⁴ We have all likely had similar experiences of empathy with the joy of someone we love.

Jesus also shows how a friend can empathize with the sorrow of his friends. In the Gospel of John we read: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus...", and when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep;" and after speaking with Martha and seeing Mary weep, when he went to the tomb, "Jesus wept."¹⁵ It is human to empathize with the sorrow of a good friend we love.

In addition to describing how friends passively undergo shared emotions of joy or sorrow in empathy with each other's goods or evils, Jesus also teaches about what friends can actively do for one another: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (Jn: 15:13). Sister Barbara Reid, O.P., wrote in her analysis of "Jesus in the Gospel of John: Friend Who Lays Down His Life Out of Love for His Friends," that "the theme weaves

¹⁴ Edith Stein, *On The Problem of Empathy* (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1989), p. 13. For a detailed analysis of Stein's description of the passions see Prudence Allen, RSM, "The Passion of Edith Stein," *Fides Quaerens Intellectum: A Journal of Theology, Philosophy, and History*, vol. 1, no. 2 (winter 2001): 201-250.

¹⁵ Jn. 5, 11, and 35.

throughout the whole Gospel... in the formation of Jesus as friend, then Jesus' ministry of making friends, and finally, Jesus teaching his disciples how to be such friends."¹⁶

A person can be a friend of God if he actively works to conform his will to the Will of God: "You are my friends if you do what I command you." (Jn. 14:14). God elevates his friends from servitude by actively sharing his most precious goods with his friends: "No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (Jn. 15:15).

Jesus reveals to us how to act when being betrayed by a friend in Mat. 26: 50, as he said to Judas in the garden: "Friend, why are you here?"; or in Luke 22:47: "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" He also prepared his disciples in *Luke* for their own vocation to suffer: "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." (Lk. 12:4).

The early Christians began to use the word 'friend' as a common way to greet one another: "Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them." (2 Jn. 1:15) And when Saint Paul was weak and in chains, even the pagans recognized the value to him of Christian friendship as described by Luke in *Acts*: "The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for." (27:3)¹⁷

¹⁶ Sister Barbara Reid, O.P., Ph.D., *The Passion of Women and the Passion of Christ*, St. Thomas Aquinas Lecture Series on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Aquinas College. October 10, 2005), pp. 10-16.

¹⁷ We can add to these examples the many times that Mary, the Mother of God, revealed how a woman lived Christian friendship: when she was invited to the wedding at Cana, along the way as she followed her Son, at the foot of the Cross standing with the women, in the upper room

Jesus Christ brought God's friendship to the world in a radically new way; and He elevated us into a new relationship with God, His Father through His friendship with us in the Holy Spirit. Thomas Aquinas referred back to Aristotle to explain why the Incarnation of Jesus Christ helped overcome the previously radical inequality in the friendship between God and man: "Furthermore, since friendship consists in a certain equality, things greatly unequal seem unable to be coupled in friendship. Therefore, to get greater familiarity in friendship between man and God it was helpful for man that God became man, since even by nature man is man's friend [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII, 1 (1155a 15-25)]."¹⁸ Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., emphasizes this in his text on *The Priestly Office*, in stating that "Human beings, alienated from God by sin, were incapable of performing acts that would placate God and reestablish friendship and communion. God, however, took the initiative through the incarnation."¹⁹

Consider how God reaches down to man's level to elevate us in St. Peter's well-known dialogue with the resurrected Jesus as it is recounted in the Gospel of *John* 21:15-17. Peter was asked three times whether he loves Jesus, and he answers that Jesus knows that he loves Him. While the same word 'love' is used throughout the English text, the Greek text opens up a deep

praying with the disciples, and later while living in the home of John. What are we to conclude from these wonderful examples of friendship among Jesus, Mary and the early disciples? How did this model of Christian friendship continue among the early Christians after the death and resurrection of Jesus? What of the friendship of the married couple Aquila and Priscilla for Paul? Christian friendship took root in the hearts and minds of the early Christians with a fire that spread and transformed the pagan world. See, for example, Father Cantalamessa, Good Friday Sermon, "There Were Also Some Women" (April 6, 2007). Available from www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=105825 [cited 4/7/2007].

¹⁸ Ibid., Book IV, chapt. 54, 6, p. 231.

¹⁹ Avery Dulles, S.J., *The Priestly Office: A Theological Reflection* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 31.

inner dynamic depending upon whether the word (*philia*), which means friendship, is used and when (*agape*), which means charity, is used. When Jesus asks first: “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”, He uses the words ‘*ἀγαπᾷς με*’ implying the love of charity. When Peter answers: “Yes, Lord,... you know that I love you,” he uses the words ‘*φιλῶ σε*’, implying the love of friendship. The second time, we find the same pattern: Jesus asks: “Do you love me (*ἀγαπᾷς με*)?; and Peter answers: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you (*φιλῶ σε*).” The third time, Jesus changes his words to come down to Peter’s level of the love of friendship in order to elevate him up into the charity of the Holy Trinity, when he asks: “Do you love me (*φιλεῖς με*)? And Peter answers “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you (*φιλῶ σε*)!”²⁰ In this exchange of great import, Jesus and Peter reveal the richness of their mutual friendship which communicates the good for the other and participates in the sharing of divine charity.

In this same remarkable dialogue Jesus sent Peter forth in his vocation with the mandate: “Take care of my lambs; take care of my sheep; take care of my sheep.” The communion of friendship-charity issued forth in his specific vocation and mission to serve others in the Church as Priest and as Pope. We recall here the words of John Paul II that we read at the beginning of this presentation: “These [*priesthood, communion, lay* paradigmatic] vocations are also at the service of one another, for the growth of the Body of Christ in history and for its mission in the world.”²¹

²⁰ *The New Testament: Greek and English*, eds. Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al. (New York: American Bible Society, second edition 1968).

²¹ See footnote 1, *Vita Consecrata*, #31.

B. Friendship and the Vocation to the Diocesan Priesthood.

The 4th c. friendship between Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen is beautifully recounted in the Office of Readings for January 2. Saint Gregory summarizes it this way:

When, in the course of time, we acknowledged our friendship and recognized that our ambition was a life of true wisdom, we became everything to each other: we shared the same lodging, the same table, the same desires, the same goal. Our love for each other great daily warmer and deeper...

Our single object and ambition was virtue... We followed the guidance of God's law and spurred each other on to virtue. If it is not too boastful to say, we found in each other a standard and rule for discerning right from wrong....

But our great pursuit, the great name we wanted, was to be Christians, to be called Christians.²²

The call to men and women to grow in Christian friendship through their particular vocation often has a hard path to follow before achieving its goal. In his Confessions, St. Augustine, (5th c.), who had been converted to love for philosophy by Cicero, describes in great detail his pre-Christian phase of friendship with Alypius. Both Augustine and Alypius had a serious difficulty with addiction, that interfered with their being able to accept their vocations to the priesthood. Augustine was addicted to sexual pleasure, and could not accept the call to a life of celibacy. Not only had he lived outside of marriage with one woman for ten years, but, after becoming engaged to another woman, who was too young to marry, he took on another mistress in the interim. Augustine describes his friend's response: "Alypius could not understand how it was that I, of whom, he thought so highly, could be so firmly caught in the toils of sexual

²² The Liturgy of the Hours (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975, vol. 1, pp.1285-87.

pleasure... He was amazed at my state of bondage.”²³ Alypius confronted Augustine with his addiction, and waited by his side as he eventually broke through this impasse to follow his vocation.

Alypius for his part was addicted to violent gladiator games. At first Augustine, as his teacher, gave an example in class, which “would make a laughing-stock of those who were under the spell of this insane sport, [and] Alypius took my words to heart...” But later Alypius, presumptuously thinking he had overcome his addiction, fell again “and his soul was stabbed with a wound more deadly than any which the gladiator, who he was so anxious to see, had received in his body.”²⁴ While he was still a student of Augustine’s, he had a close call with the law, which cured him of his addiction. Augustine described Alypius’ weaknesses but then concluded: “These were the qualities I knew in Alypius, who was my close friend and, like myself, was perplexed to know what course of life we ought to follow.”²⁵ As is well known, they both became diocesan priests and bishops full of zeal for the renewal and development of the Church. They had indeed “tasted salt-together” as Aristotle had recommended. Once confirmed in his vocation as Diocesan Priest and Bishop of Hippo, North Africa, Augustine served both the laity through his elaboration of their call to elevate the world especially through the secular

²³ Augustine, *Confessions* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1981), Book VI, 12, p, 129.

²⁴ Ibid., Book VI, 7-8, pp, 120-123.

²⁵ Ibid., Book VI, 7, 10, p. 125.

vocation to political life²⁶ and consecrated religious through his *Rule*, which stills serves as the foundation for many religious communities.²⁷

Sister Marie Aquinas McNamara, OP says in her book, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine*, that “Saint Augustine...was endowed with a genius for friendship...”²⁸ He sought to Christianize friendship so that it extended outwards to others: “...because friendship is rooted in Christian love, it is not confined within the narrow limits of a small circle. On the contrary, ‘it must include all those to whom love and affection are due, although it goes more readily to some, and more slowly to others, but it reaches even our enemies, for whom we are commanded to pray.’”²⁹ Not only does friendship extend in space, but Augustine described friendship as overcoming the temporal limits of death, by moving forward into the perfection of friendship in eternal life: “There is no true friendship unless You (God) weld it between souls that cleave together through that charity which is shed in our hearts by the Holy [Spirit] who is given to us.”³⁰

²⁶ See Augustine’s *The City of God* (Garden City, N. Y: Image Books, 1958) and the properly secular culture of the lay vocation reaffirmed by John Paul II, *Cristifideles Laici*, #15-16.

²⁷ See Agatha Mary, s.p.b., *The Rule of Saint Augustine: An Essay in Understanding* (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Press, 1992). See also John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, #1.

²⁸ Sister Marie Aquinas McNamara, O.P., *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine* (New York: Alba House, 1957), 240.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 237. See also Paul J. Waddell’s summary. “McNamara notes four distinguishing marks to Augustine’s understanding of friendship. First the author and giver of friendship is God. Second, friendship must be rooted in God and seek God. Third, Christian friendship is transformed by grace. Fourth, it does not end with the Kingdom, but there reaches its perfection when everyone has perfect friendship with God.”, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 97.

C. Friendship and Consecrated Religious Life

In the 12th century, Aelred of Rievaulx, a Cistercian monk, wrote extensively about friendships among men in consecrated religious life. In his classic text entitled *Spiritual Friendship*, Aelred followed Augustine's lead in viewing Christian friendship on earth as preparation for friendship in heaven:

This is that extraordinary and great happiness which we await, with God himself acting and diffusing, between himself and his creatures whom he has uplifted, among the very degrees and orders which he has distinguished, among the individual souls whom he has chosen, so much friendship and charity, that thus each loves another as he does himself; and that, by this means, just as each one rejoices in his own, so does he rejoice in the good fortune of another, and thus the happiness of each one individually is the happiness of all, and the universality of all happiness is the possession of each individual. There one finds no hiding of thoughts, no dissembling of affection. This is true and eternal friendship, which begins in this life and is perfected in the next, which here belongs to the few where few are good, but there belongs to all where all are good.³¹

Aelred's text, which is a three part dialogue among various friends in the monastery, uses many distinctions already common to the classical literature on friendship from Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine, but he adds some new ones as well. For example, he elaborates on five ways identified in the book of Sirach, by which a friendship may be destroyed: upbraiding, reproach,

³¹ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1977), Book III, 79, p. 111.

pride, disclosing of secrets to another, or giving a treacherous wound to the friend.³² Then he adds a sixth, namely that if a friend injures someone you are bound to love.³³

Aelred distinguishes false friendships from true friendships: “Hence let one kind of friendship be called carnal, another worldly, and another spiritual. The carnal springs from mutual harmony in vice; the worldly is enkindled by the hope of gain; and the spiritual is cemented by similarity of life, morals, and pursuits among the just.”³⁴ One can hear the echo of Aristotle’s and Cicero’s three kinds of friendships, here, but Aelred christianizes the good kind of friendship or spiritual friendship as “a mutual conformity in matters human and divine united with benevolence and charity.”³⁵ He concludes that spiritual friendship is the only kind worthy of the name of friendship. Friendships must be tested over the years, and in religious life, in a monastery where people live a common life for many years together, there is ample opportunity to discover through testing which friendships are worthy of the name. In religious life Aelred concludes:

And thus a friend praying to Christ on behalf of his friend, and for his friend’s sake desiring to be heard by Christ, directs his attention with love and longing to Christ; then it sometimes happens that quickly and imperceptibly the one love passes over into the other, and coming, as it were, into close contact with the sweetness of Christ himself, the friend begins to taste his sweetness and to experience his charm. Thus ascending from that holy love with which he embraces a friend to that with which he embraces Christ, he

³² *Ibid.*, III, 23, p. 96.

³³ *Ibid.*, III, 46, p. 102.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 38, p. 59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 46, p. 61.

will joyfully partake in abundance of the spiritual fruit of friendship, awaiting the fullness of all things in the life to come.³⁶

In the 13th century, the Dominican Thomas Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologica*, elaborated in detail the relation of Christian friendship-charity to Aristotelian natural friendship:

According to the Philosopher [Aristotle in] (*Ethic.* viii, 2,3), not every love has the character of friendship, but that love which is together with benevolence, when, to wit, **[1] we love someone so as to wish good to him.** If, however, we do not wish good to what we love, but wish its good for ourselves, (thus we are said to love wine, or a horse, or the like) it is love not of friendship, but of a kind of concupiscence. For it would be absurd to speak of having friendship for wine or for a horse. Yet neither does well-wishing suffice for friendship, for **[2] a certain mutual love is requisite**, since friendship is between friend and friend: and this well-wishing is **[3] founded on some kind of communication.**

Accordingly, since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication... The love which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that **[4] charity is the friendship of man for God.**³⁷

In this one paragraph we see the four essential characteristics of Christian friendship beautifully expressed.

St. Thomas Aquinas, known today as the “Doctor of Humanity,”³⁸ elaborated in detail four essential characteristics of Christian friendship and affirmed the great value of friendship for

³⁶ Ibid., III, 133-134, p. 131. In the 11th- 12th century St. Anselm, a Benedictine monk, writes about just this dynamic in his “Prayer for Friends,” in *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm* (Penguin Paperback, 1973), chapter 18.

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol.III. I-II, Q. 23.

³⁸ John Paul II Apostolic Letter *Inter Munera Academicarum* (January 28, 1999), #4. Throughout the paper, I have used **bold** to highlight the words **friend** and **friendship** in primary texts.

human persons. In Question 23 of Part II-II of the *Summa Theologica* Thomas asked: Whether Charity is Friendship? He answered that true friendship has the following four essential characteristics: (1) that **good or benevolence** is wished for the friend and not primarily for oneself through a kind of concupiscence; (2) that it is a **mutual love** between both friends, and not one-sided; (3) that it is founded on some kind of **communication**; and (4) that it is **a form of charity**.³⁹

This movement is traditionally described as a journey, in which we are like pilgrims or wayfarers. Along this journey within our particular place in the space/time continuum, we will pass through our own death, towards eternal life (we hope) with God and the communion of saints. St. Thomas argues that during this pilgrimage we are called to grow in the friendship of charity:

The charity of the wayfarer can increase. For we are called wayfarers by reason of our being on the way to God, who is our Last End or beatitude. On this way we draw near to God, who is ... **approached by the affections of the mind**... . It pertains therefore to the **very notion of the charity of a wayfarer that it can increase**...⁴⁰

2. Friendship applied to Consecrated Religious in uni-gender communities of women or of men

In 1971 Pope Paul VI in *Evangelica Testificatio*, identifies friendship as an important aspect of religious community life: "There is no doubt that community spirit, **relationships of**

³⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Md: Christian Classics, 1948), 5 vols, Vol.III. I-II, Q. 23.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II Q. 24, art.4. This translation is from Schleck, *ibid.*, 93.

friendship and fraternal cooperation in the same apostolate, as well as mutual support in a shared life chose for a better service of Christ, are so many valuable factors in this daily progress.”⁴¹ In 1978, the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, mandated religious to become “experts in communion”, ecclesial communities in the Church and in the world, as witness and architects of the plan for unity, a living sign of the intimate union with God, and of fraternal fellowship for the Church and the world.⁴² This affirmation of the importance of friendship in contemporary religious vocations is repeated in 1983 by the Sacred Congregation in *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life*, a (1983) document addressed directly to the Bishops of the United States.

For religious, communion in Christ is expressed in a stable and visible way through community life. So important is community living to religious consecration that every religious, whatever his or her apostolic work, is bound to it by the fact of profession and must normally live under the authority of a local superior in a community of the institute to which he or she belongs... Sharing of prayer, work, meals, leisure, common spirit, “**relations of friendship**, cooperation in the same apostolate, and mutual support in community of life chosen for a better following of Christ, are so many valuable factors in daily progress.” (ET 39)... Its unity is a symbol of the coming of Christ and is a source of apostolic energy and power... The capacity to live community life with its joys and restraints is a quality which distinguishes a religious vocation to a given institute and it is a key criterion of suitability in a candidate.⁴³

A crucial aspect of community in religious life is that local communities are usually not self-selected on the basis of friendships already established, but their members are chosen by religious authority, as directed by the Holy Spirit. Christian Friendships then flourish within the

⁴¹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelica Testificatio*, (1971), #39.

⁴² Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Religious and Human Promotion* (April 25-28, 1978), #24.

⁴³ Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life* (1983), #19.

subsequent framework of a vibrant common life, when they fulfill the four-fold criteria identified by Thomas Aquinas.⁴⁴

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, identifies in *Fraternal Life in Community* (1994) the need for consecrated religious to integrate their “affectivity correctly, both inside and outside the community.”⁴⁵ They link this vocation directly with the capacity in a religious for friendship:

To love one’s vocation, to hear the call as something that gives true meaning to life, and to cherish consecration as a true, beautiful and good reality which gives truth, beauty and goodness to one’s own existence— all of this makes a person strong and autonomous, secure in one’s own identity, free of the need for various forms of support and compensation, especially in the area of affectivity. All this reinforces the bond that links the consecrated person to those who share his or her calling. It is with them, first and foremost, that he or she feels called to live relationships of fraternity and **friendship**.⁴⁶

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on *Consecrated Life (Vita Consecrata)*, in 1996, John Paul II elaborated further on the value of Christian friendship in religious life for the Church and the world. The beginning point is friendship with God: “To the degree that they deepen their friendship with God, consecrated persons become better prepared to help their brothers and sisters through valuable spiritual activities....”⁴⁷ Friendship becomes the way that an initial relation with Christ is transformed: “After the enthusiasm of the first meeting with Christ,

⁴⁴ For a presentation of a different view, see Sandra Schneiders, *Selling All* (Mahway, New Jersey, Paulist Press, 2001), chapters 8-12. Schneiders argues against the more traditional view of how common life ought to be fostered in religious communities.

⁴⁵ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community* (1994), #37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, # 39.

there comes the constant struggle of everyday life, a struggle which turns a vocation into a tale of friendship with the Lord.⁴⁸

John Paul II's love for the place of friendship with God in religious life is revealed throughout the document. Friendship with God becomes the fruitful source of religious life. "True prophecy is born of God, from **friendship** with him, from attentive listening to his word in the different circumstances of history."⁴⁹ Meditation on the Bible in common calls religious "to prayerful reading of the Scriptures, in which God 'speaks to people as **friends** (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar 3:38), so that he may invite and draw them into fellowship with himself."⁵⁰ Apostolic work in an inter-religious context, introduces the theme of dialogue and friendship: "In order to foster reciprocal knowledge, respect and charity, Religious Institutes can also promote appropriate forms of dialogue, marked by **cordial friendship** and mutual sincerity..."⁵¹ Similarly for the place of religious in ecumenical relations: "Sharing of the *lectio divina* in the search for the truth, a participation in common prayer, in which the Lord assures us of his presence (cf. Mt 18:20), the dialogue of friendship and **charity** makes us feel how pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity (cf. Ps 133)..."⁵²

Pope Benedict XVI

After Pope John Paul II died in 2005, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, gave the homily on the Occasion of the Election of the new Pope. In this homily he called for: "a mature adult faith"

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, # 64.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, #84.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, #94, referring back to Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, #2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, #102.

⁵² *Ibid.*, #103.

[that] is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth."⁵³

Cardinal Ratzinger reminds us that although we must work to build friendships of virtue by acts of intellect and will, we can not by ourselves build Christian friendships, for these are first offered to us by Jesus Christ. While his words were addressed to the Cardinals in the conclave, they can be applied equally to the three paradigm vocations:

The Lord calls us friends, he makes us his friends, he gives us his friendship. The Lord gives friendship a dual definition. There are no secrets between friends: Christ tells us all that he hears from the Father; he gives us his full trust and with trust, also knowledge. He reveals his face and his heart to us. **He reveals his face and his heart to us.** He shows us the tenderness he feels for us, his passionate love that goes even as far as the folly of the Cross. He entrusts himself to us... He entrusts his Body, the Church to us.

The second element Jesus uses to define friendship is the **communion of wills**. ... Our redemption is brought about in this communion of wills: **being friends of Jesus, to become friends of God... Thank you, Jesus, for your friendship! ...**

It is here that appears the dynamism of the life of a Christian...: I chose you to go forth. We must be enlivened by a holy restlessness: **a restlessness to bring everyone the gift of faith, of friendship with Christ. Truly, the love and friendship of God was given to us so that it might also be shared with others.**⁵⁴

The dynamic energy for friendship with Christ that pours out of this homily blossomed into Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, (2006). He sought to heal the wounded direction of charity and friendship-love in order to draw all Catholics into beginning again to live Christian friendship. The Holy Father describes three kinds of love: charity,

⁵³ Joseph Ratzinger, Homily, "Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice", available at www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_200050418_en.html [cited 4/16/2007], p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3

friendship, and erotic love. He distinguishes their particular characteristics and then describes how they can be integrated and reunited in the fullness of Christian vocation.

The characteristics of *agape* or charity are: it is a descending love from God, freely given, based on the character of the one loving, an *amor benevolente*, an oblation love, a love that passes through the pierced side of Christ, an elective love in which God chooses a person like Peter, a healing love because it is a forgiving love, and a love of neighbor which is also called "friendship charity."⁵⁵

In contrast to this descending love of God, Pope Benedict also describes an ascending love that springs out of the hearts of all men and women, a love which he names *eros*. He identifies four levels of *eros*, or four different kinds of *eros*. We need to be attentive to the differences among them, because they often penetrate and transform friendships for the better or for the worse. At the lowest level, [1] *eros* is simply a desire or sex-drive, which is so impersonal that anyone can satisfy it. At the second level, [2] *eros* becomes a form of personal love for something or someone that has value for us in our self-centered personal identity; it is a possessive or covetous non-Christian love, or *amor concupiscentia*.⁵⁶ At a still higher, third level, [3] *eros* can turn one's focus away from the self and self-gratification and rise in ecstasy

⁵⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), #6-7, 10, 14, and 25.

⁵⁶ Pope Benedict redirects this Platonic model of homosexual *eros*, whose imaginary mythical roots were also described by Aristophanes in the Symposium, away from homosexual *eros* towards heterosexual *eros*: "...[O]ne might detect hints of ideas that are also found, for example, in the myth mentioned by Plato, according to which man was originally spherical, because he was complete in himself and self-sufficient. But as a punishment for pride, he was split in two by Zeus, so that now he longs for his other half, striving with all his being to possess it and thus to regain his integrity... [T]he idea is certainly present that man is somehow incomplete, driven by nature to seek in another the part that can make him whole, the idea that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become 'complete.'", Plato, *Symposium*, XIV-XV, *Collected Works*, eds., Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 217 c-219e 189c-192d, in Benedict, *Deus Caritas Est*, #11.

(ex-stasis) towards the Divine object of love seeking to love in an inter-personal way, by renunciation of self-centeredness, by purifying disordered desires, and by healing the wounded condition of one's human nature. Finally, at the fourth, highest, and most inter-Personal level, Pope Benedict states that [4] there is *eros* love in God, even though He is totally *agape*, because in the Holy Trinity there is always a tending of one Divine Person towards another Divine Person, and also because God enjoys loving us.⁵⁷

If we think of the love of friendship (*philia*) as an interpersonal relationship, we can imagine it as fitting horizontally, like the cross-bar between the descending *agape* love of God and the ascending *eros* love of our human nature. Friendship is often lived out in the middle of the tensions of various forms of *eros* springing up within us and of the gifts of Divine love or *agape* reaching down to us, lifting us up, and sending us forth to live our vocation for the good of others. In the particular vocation to which we have been called, our task is to reject outward acting on the lower forms of *eros* love with asceticism proper to our state in life, to integrate the energy of the higher forms of *eros* love into our love for Jesus Christ. At the same time, being renewed by the *agape* love of the Holy Trinity shared with us in the Sacraments, and especially the Holy Eucharist, we go forth to foster ever deep bonds of friendship with those to whom we are bound by our vocation, i.e., spouse and family, brother seminarians and priests, or sisters or brothers in our religious community.

Pope Benedict offers in *Deus Caritas Est* a clear response to the Cartesian separation of mind and body, which has had such distorting effects on theories of friendship in modern philosophy and beyond. In his goal to foster the true integration of the way human beings love he states:

⁵⁷ Benedict, *Deus Caritas Est*, #3-8, 11, and 17.

Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of *eros* can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved. Should he aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness. The epicure Gassendi used to offer Descartes the humorous greeting: "O Soul!" And Descartes would reply: "O Flesh!" Yet it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love—*eros*—able to mature and attain its authenticity.